



## SQ-4R: Survey, Question- Read, wRite, Recite, Review

SQ-4R is a successful method of remembering, retrieving, and thoroughly learning material for a quiz, test, or for simply understanding a body of information. Learning this specific method will get you into the habit of practicing intense and effective studying. Since the learning process is rather complex, study habits that fit the natural style of learning by repetition and depth prove most effective. However, it is helpful to know that you can tailor the steps to fit your liking, style, and time to prepare for an exam. This handout will look at each of the 6 steps in the SQ-4R method and discuss and generate guidelines and suggestions for effectively using each step.

The following table shows the 6 steps in the SQ-4R process, and defines the purpose and direction the following discussion of each step:

Step	Purpose
1. Survey	Skim text for general comprehension.
2. Question	Create questions from text (terms, main ideas, headings), which will be answered in the following steps.
3. Read	Read text thoroughly for understanding, and answer questions from previous step.
4. Write	Summarize information on paper in your own words and write notes in margins.
5. Recite	Explain main concepts and terms aloud to yourself.
6. Review	Check for understanding and review all information and concepts.

Having previewed the 6 steps, let's look at each step separately to understand the purpose, intent, and importance of each step and the effect it has on the learning process as a whole.

### 1. SURVEY

The first step in the SQ-4R process is surveying the information. For example, if you are studying a specific chapter, browse through it, focusing on the headings, bold print, and graphs and pictures. Try not to concentrate too heavily on understanding specific terms and ideas, but rather focus on skimming the words/phrases to use for further reference. For example, skim the introduction and conclusion, spotlighting *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *how* information. Look at the table of contents, quotes at the beginning of the chapters, and/or preview of the study section. This survey will help you understand the direction the author will take and will familiarize you with the concepts to be comprehended with further studying.



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## **Survey Summary**

1. Survey all pictures, graphs, and examples in the paragraph.
2. Observe bold print such as headings and key words.
3. Skim the introduction, conclusion, and/or summary.

## **2. QUESTION**

Now that you have surveyed the information and have grasped the main points, ask some questions based on the information in the chapter. Then, as you browse through the chapter, include questions regarding headings, paragraphs, and key terms. Remember to generate open-ended, or higher-level questions, that is, a question that requires more than a short answer.

Let's look at one example. If you open your book to a chapter on visual organizers, a few of your first questions might be

- ❖ What are visual organizers? [lower-level question]
- ❖ How do you create visual organizers?
- ❖ What are the advantages of making your own visual organizers?
- ❖ Why are visual organizers useful and necessary in the learning process? [higher-level question]

In the first question above, the answer is a mere definition. This is useful for memorization, but a more developed question like # 4 will allow your mind to comprehend the definition as well as the overall concept in the chapter (Nist & Diehl, 2002).

In addition, you have an important reason for reading the information: to find the answer to the question you have posed. You can then answer these questions in the following steps.

## **Question Summary**

1. Turn each heading into a question.
2. Formulate *who*, *what*, *when*, *where* questions.
3. Ask yourself where your weak points are in the chapter.
4. Ask yourself what data/terms/information need to be memorized. For example, terms in bold print are often key to the overall purpose and meaning of the chapter.
5. Write questions in the margins.

## **3. READ**

Because reading carefully and critically is a time-consuming process in and of itself, many students tend to skip this step and rely on skimming/surveying the information. However, failing to read and comprehend the information can prove detrimental in many cases because the majority of information is revealed in the depths of paragraphs. Many terms appear in the bodies of the paragraphs as well. While you are reading, study graphs, illustrations, and examples intently to understand the text more fully. You may want to use a highlighter to



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emphasize and retrieve important information, and you will probably want to write notes in the margins. These two additional comprehension tools will help in class discussion and bring out key ideas from the paragraph. Most of all, remember to read with a purpose (answer the questions you previously asked).

### **Read Summary**

1. Find the answers to the heading questions in the paragraphs.
2. Focus on terms, examples, and bold print.
3. Study graphs, illustrations, and examples carefully.
4. Study any weaknesses, such as concepts and terms, carefully in the chapter.
5. Write notes in the margins.

#### **4. WRITE**

Writing important information from the paragraph, chapter, and/or study section will help tremendously when you are attempting to remember/recite the information. Also, this step will give you notes to study and read in other study sessions. Write as much as possible without referring to the text. Doing so will help you to remember and actually learn the information.

### **Write Summary**

1. Write out the answers to the heading questions from the previous step.
2. Write the definitions of key terms.
3. Diagram or reconstruct areas and concepts from the text in your own words, especially those that are confusing to you.
4. Expand on ideas introduced in the text with your own thoughts.

#### **5. RECITE**

The fifth step in the SQ-4R method is reciting the information aloud to yourself to ensure understanding and memorization. When you recite information of any kind, it causes your brain to receive the information and then relay it back, forcing you to contemplate and think about the information received. If you cannot recite concepts from the chapter during this process, return to the book and read aloud areas that you have trouble putting into your own words. Hellyer, Robinson, and Sherwood (2001) suggest, "Do this as soon as you finish reading and marking the chapter, while the answers are still fresh in your mind. If you mark your chapter without the follow-up recitation, you are likely to think you know the answers, but when you have to take a test, you may not remember the information" (pg. 119). In other words, recitation confirms thorough understanding rather than mere memorization.

If you practice explaining what the author means, you are more likely to be able to do the same on the test.



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### **Recite Summary**

1. Recite the questions that you posed in Step 2.
2. Recite the answers to the questions found in the text.
3. Recite the information in your own words. Now, summarize the information in your own words.
4. Make up an example (different from the author's example) for any concept or main point in the paragraph/chapter, and draw graphs and illustrations of visual material from the book.

\* If you cannot perform all of these sub-steps, return to the reading section for review and repetition.

### **6. REVIEW**

Reviewing is a method many students perform regularly, but at the wrong time and in the wrong situation. Students generally review (cram) for the test right before the actual exam, and are not able to process the information effectively because it was not channeled through their minds in the right manner. Therefore, review the material directly after you have completed the previous steps to reiterate the knowledge you have gained by actively studying.

### **Review Summary**

1. Skim over each major heading.
2. Cover the text and/or notes you have taken to see how much information you can recite on your own.
3. Summarize each paragraph/section.
4. Read your marginal notes to remember important thoughts and ideas.
5. Review approximately 5-10 minutes daily until the exam.

### **REMEMBER . . .**

As the formal process comes to a close, remember that studying never ends. Keep the material on your mind and reflect upon ideas and thoughts regularly. Expand the knowledge you have learned from studying by incorporating knowledge, skills, and experience that you have already acquired. Repeating the process each day will help you to remember the steps as well as truly learn the information. Try leaving two hours a day for studying. If this much time is not available for each class, use as much time as you can afford for reviewing the information. Get yourself into the habit of completing the entire process with the new information you receive daily, and you will be rewarded by increased understanding of information and concepts.



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## Works Cited

Hellyer, R., Robinson, C., & Sherwood, P. (2001). *Study skills for learning power*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed).  
Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Nist, S.L., & Diehl, W. (2002). *Developing textbook thinking: strategies for success in college*.  
(5<sup>th</sup> ed). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

## Recommended Resources

Hopper, C. H. (2001). *Practicing college study skills: Strategies for success*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Boston:  
Houghton Mifflin Company.

Luzzo, D. A., Spencer, M. K. (2002). *Overcoming the hurdles to academic success: Strategies  
that make a difference*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

McWhorter, K. T. (1989). *College reading and study skills*. (4<sup>th</sup> ed). Boston: Scott, Foresman  
and Company.

Pauk, W. (2001). *How to study in college*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

The following online sources give information on study skills facts and information:

Learning style survey

[http://www.metamath.com//multiple/multiple\\_choice\\_questions.cgi](http://www.metamath.com//multiple/multiple_choice_questions.cgi)

The importance of making a schedule

<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/augustine/study/schedule.html>

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